

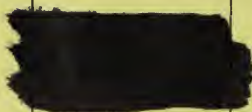
THE BIRD OF VENUS

The person charging this material is responsible for its return to the library from which it was withdrawn on or before the **Latest Date** stamped below.

**Theft, mutilation, and underlining of books
are reasons for disciplinary action and may
result in dismissal from the University.**

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS LIBRARY AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

APR 26 1975
MAR 22 1983



L161—O-1096



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2017 with funding from
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Alternates

<https://archive.org/details/birdofvenus00thro>



741

The Bird of Venus

By GEORGE REEVES THROOP

Reprinted from WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY STUDIES
Vol. IX, Humanistic Series, No. 2, pp. 275-291, 1922

AS LIBRARY OF THE

JUN 27 1924

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

UNIVERSITY OF
ILLINOIS LIBRARY

THE BIRD OF VENUS

GEORGE REEVES THROOP

Collier Professor of Greek

As is well known, certain animals were more or less closely connected with or consecrated to various ancient deities, as the eagle to Zeus, the serpent and the owl to Athene, the peacock to Hera, the hawk to Apollo; while doves, swine, hares, fish, and many prolific animals were sacred to Aphrodite.¹ Among the birds, columbae, turtures, passerres, perdicces, coturnices, anseres, anates, cygni, etc., are all at times found to be associated with or sacred to Venus, doubtless in view of their supposedly lascivious characteristics. They often appear with this goddess on works of art, are offered as presents or used as helpers by lovers in their amours, or serve for the amusement of women and children.² On numerous vases and other monuments these birds have an amorous signification and become, in fact, erotic symbols. This is particularly true under Græco-Roman influence.

The association of the dove with Venus is probably better recognized than that of any other bird, but it is certainly not the first animal that was attached to her³ and only became the best known because of its more artistic and even aesthetic character. In fact, the evidence shows that the sparrow was the original companion of the goddess of love, even from such

¹ Luebker, *Reallexikon*, p. 81; Preller-Robert, *Griech. Myth.*⁴, pp. 380-82; Roscher, *Lexikon*, p. 398.

² Keller, *Die antike Tierwelt*, II, 346; Daremberg et Saglio, p. 700; Anaxandrides ap. Athen. 14. 654b (tr. Yonge): "And Anaxandrides in his 'Reciprocal Lover'—'For bringing in some pigeons and some sparrows!'" Arnobius, *adv. Nationes*, VII. 8: ut parvuli pusiones . . . passerculos, pupulos, eculeos, panes accipiunt.

³ Preller-Robert, *l.c.*, p. 381, n. 5; Hehn, *Culturpflanzen u. Haustiere*³, pp. 296 ff.

THE LIBRARY OF THE

JUN 27 1924

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

early times as to render it possible for us to think that the bird was not bestowed on the goddess by the Greeks themselves but that it came as her companion from some extraneous quarter, possibly from Asia or Asia Minor, though some small evidence might lead in another direction.

The sparrow is shown to be sacred to the goddess in both Greek and Latin literary records and in plastic art, though only to a small extent in the latter. Its connection with her and its well known amateness and prolificness, which undoubtedly brought about its association in the beginning, resulted in the bird becoming a symbol for salacity or lewdness. This is attested even in such places where an indirect reference to the goddess of love can be inferred and also where the name of the bird or derivatives therefrom are used in amatory and even obscene applications or meanings. The employment of the more artistic dove certainly assisted in relegating the sparrow, except occasionally, to a more lowly sphere, but one in which its connection was none the less clearly felt.

The sparrow was and is the commonest bird in Greece and is native to all Mediterranean territory.⁴ The type is that of the common or house-sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), though the Greeks did not distinguish this variety (except in rare instances)⁵ from the tree or field-sparrow (*Passer montanus*), but designated them both as στρούθος⁶ in ancient and as σπουργίτης in modern times. The sparrow has in fact been common from the earliest times in Europe, Asia, and Africa and its antiquity cannot be better attested than by its use as

⁴ Keller, *l.c.*, p. 88; Thompson, *Glossary of Greek Birds*, p. 161.

⁵ By Alexander of Myndos, as quoted in Athenaeus, IX. 391 ff (tr. Yonge): "And Alexander the Myndian says that there are two kinds of sparrows, the one a tame species, and the other a wild one; and he adds that the hen-sparrow is weaker in other respects, and also that their beaks are of a more horny color, and that their faces are not very white, nor very black; but Aristotle says that the cock-sparrow never appears in the winter, but that the hen-sparrows remain, drawing his conclusions as to what he thinks probable from their color; for their color changes, as the color of blackbirds and coots does, who get white at certain seasons."

⁶ For the accent compare Chandler, 243, and the references cited.

a hieroglyphic symbol. That the *passer domesticus* is the type in mind is shown by the descriptions of Aristotle and the particular statement that the males do not have a black bill at first but acquire it later. The Elder Pliny's description of the bird is taken from Aristotle and shows that the Latin *passer* is the same as the Greek *στρουθός*.⁷ The bird and its habits are described in more or less completeness by Aristotle, and there can be no doubt of the identification.

It is infrequently claimed that *στρουθός* and 'passer' are at times used generically for small birds of sparrow size or type.⁸ The evidence for such cases is very small and such indirect interpretation as can be given to this end is either arbitrary or late. The word "passer" did shift partly in Romance⁹ into the general meaning of "bird" but in practically all instances where the word *passer* or *στρουθός* is applied to other birds a definitive appellation is added which removes doubt. The case of the ostrich (*στρουθός μεγάλη*) is in point but somewhat more complicated and will be noted later.

The sparrow, however, is in no sense a "holy" bird and the instances related in Herodotus and Aelian of sparrows under the protection of the gods in the temples where they nested are to be considered merely as such, without reference to any characteristics of the bird itself.¹⁰ The mention of gold and silver sparrows in the inventory of temple property from Samos is also not to be pressed as we do not know their use or association.

From certain passages of Homer, Sappho, and Apuleius, in particular, we acquire testimony pointing directly to the belief of the ancients in the connection of the sparrow with Aphrodite. Elsewhere, as in Aristophanes and the comic poets, evidence is found of an indirect character but it clearly arises from the circumstances of the above belief. In

⁷ Aubert and Wimmer, *Aristoteles Thierkunde*, p. 108; Aristot. *H. A.* IX. 7. 58; Plin. *N. H.* 10. 36. 52; Keller, *l. c.* p. 88.

⁸ Cf. Apuleius, *Metam.* 8. 20; Kaibel, *Epigr. Gr.* 1082, (b) 5; Thompson, *l. c.*, p. 161.

⁹ Span. pájaro; Port. passaro; Roum. pasăre.

¹⁰ Herod. I. 159; Aelian, *V. H.* V. 17.

27 June 1924 9. Prof. H. J. Bartow.

Alexandrian and in Roman times the bird has rather become a symbol. In this capacity it is sometimes interchanged with the ostrich, which bears its name, or its name is used for such designations as its character has suggested. The evidence of plastic art is in accord with the above.

The omen of Calchas, as related in the second book of the *Iliad*,¹¹ affords the first mention of the sparrow in Greek literature. The main points of the story are of some importance as bearing on the identification of the bird:

When the Greeks were sacrificing at Aulis, a serpent rushing from beneath the altar, darted to a plane tree in whose branches nested a sparrow with her eight young. All of these he devoured but was himself in turn changed into stone. As Calchas prophesied, the omen foretold the nine years of fruitless war at Troy and the capture of the city in the tenth year.

The story is frequently given in extenso or referred to by later writers. Cicero translates the entire passage in typically wretched hexameters; the story is told by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses*; Vergil imitates it directly but uses the serpent only, omitting the sparrow; it is referred to by Petronius; Philostratus uses it to explain an analogous prodigy in his *Apollonius of Tyana*; Origen with interesting naïveté gives the entire account with the comment that if the sparrow were a bird of augury and gifted with knowledge it would have known better than to build its nest in so dangerous a place; the story is also given in all its essential form in the *Ilias Latina*; it is apparently referred to by Aeschylus in the *Agamemnon*; and is also touched upon by Apollodorus in the *Epitome*, by Proclus in his *Chrestomathy*, and by Lycophron in the *Alexandra*.¹²

¹¹ Vv. 299-330.

¹² Cic. *de Div.* 2. 30. 63-65; cf. *ibid.* 1. 33. 72; Ovid, *Metam.* 12. 11-23; Verg. *Aen.* 5. 84-93 (cf. Servius, ad loc.); Petronius, *Sat.* p. 60 (ed. Buecheler); Philostratus, *Vita Apoll.* I. 22; Origenes, in *Celsum*, 4. 91; *Ilias Latina* (PLM, III, ed. Baehrens), vv. 147-53; Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 145; Apollodorus, *Epitome*, 3. 15; Proclus in *Epic. Graec. Frag.* (ed. Kinkel), p. 18; Lycophron, *Alexandra*, 202-3.

Pausanias (9. 19. 7) even saw at Aulis in the second century the remains of

The identification of the sparrow in the Homeric passage has at times been denied but admits of no practical doubt. Στρουθός has been supposed to be merely a generic name for small birds in general but this, as stated above, can be supported only by most insufficient evidence. It is claimed that sparrows do not nest in trees and that they do not lay as many as eight eggs (unless this large number be considered a part of the portent). The fact that the Greeks did not distinguish between the passer montanus, which ordinarily builds in trees, and the passer domesticus would sufficiently account for the objection. But, as a matter of fact, the common sparrow does build in trees¹³ though less frequently than around houses or near the habitations of man. The sparrow will often have broods of from six to eight¹⁴ and from three to four times each season. The number of eight is even testified to by Aristotle as well as by present day ornithologists. The actual facts of the case tend, as in so many other instances, to confirm the extreme accuracy of Homer in all statements regarding natural history and analogous matters.¹⁵

The preceding discussion is of pertinence as introductory to the testimony of the Homeric Scholiast who gives a symbolic interpretation of the omen which is probably to be taken with great scepticism for the Homeric period, though certainly indicative of the status of the bird in Alexandrian times and, by reason of its definite connection with Aphrodite in the the wood of the plane-tree and the spring beside which it grew. In addition, there seems to have been at Aulis a temple of Aphrodite Argynnis built by Agamemnon in honor of Argynnus, the youth drowned in the Cephissus. Cf. Athenaeus, XIII. 604d; Steph. Byz. s. v.; Clem. Alex. *Protr.* II. 38; Prop. 4. 7. 22.

¹³ Ps. ciii: 17: "The little sparrows nest in the cedars"; Aelian (*de Nat. Animal.* 4. 38) apparently has the Homeric passage in mind in his account of the nesting of the sparrows in the tree-tops.

¹⁴ Eaton, *N. Y. State Mus.*, Memoir 12, pt. 2, *Birds of New York*, 1914, pp. 258-60; Barrows, *Bull.* 1, *Biol. Survey*, 1889; Aristot. *frag.* 273 (B and B), cf. Athenaeus, IX. 391 f.

¹⁵ It may also be noted that the sparrow and the owl, another animal sacred to Athene, stood symbolically for enmity or hatred, just as the serpent and the sparrow are used in the above instance; cf. Horapoll. *Hieroglyph.* II. 51.

well known poem of Sappho, to be quoted later, not impossible of some degree of accuracy. The Scholia on the various lines of the text are as follows:

The plane tree is fond of water and is suitable for the rearing of sparrows . . . The serpent is sacred to Athena and the sparrows to Aphrodite. They indicate time since time is winged. . . The nest at the top of the tree is wind-swept Troy and the nestlings cowering beneath the leaves are the short lived Trojans. . . The mother, the ninth, indicated the last contest of the nine year period . . . while the survival of the nests showed that the site of Troy was not entirely razed, for it is still inhabited. The turning of the serpent into stone is the difficulty of the Returns . . . it is a *σῆμα* that the nest is at the top of the tree and a *τέρας* that the brood numbers eight. For the sparrow brings forth seven.¹⁶

The Scholia Townleyana add a few incidental interpretations:

The turning of the serpent into stone is either the difficulty of the Returns or the cessation of the entire contest, for the Trojans no longer warded off the Greeks . . . *ἐλελιξάμενος*: not even was this meaningless for the prophesy for they did not immediately conquer and capture the city, but took it by putting to sea from the Troad and then returning . . . The turning of the serpent into stone showed that it was no longer a war of movement.¹⁷

The symbolism of the Scholiast will in all probability seem foreign to the directness and simplicity of the early epic. Yet it is perhaps unimportant to hold closely to the above interpretation inasmuch as the question at issue is solely the belief of the Greeks themselves in the early attribution of the sparrow to Aphrodite and their consequent action in so regarding the Homeric passage. It is certainly clear in this that, irrespective of what Homer had in mind, they regarded the sparrow as the earliest bird or animal sacred to the goddess, a belief certainly justified by the early occurrence of the legend in Sappho.

The omen of the sparrows has also been thought to have

¹⁶ *Scholia graeca in Homeri Iliadem* (ed Dindorf), 307-8.

¹⁷ *Scholia graeca in Homeri Iliadem Townleyana* (ed. Maass), 308, 316, 329.

its pertinence from the fact that as a symbol the sparrow was supposed to stand for the year. This might have resulted from the belief of the ancients in the short life¹⁸ of the sparrow and their opinion that it lives for only one year. It is possible that his belief was sufficient to establish it in connection with the reproductive powers of nature in the same way as other better recognized and attested objects. But its connection with the goddess of love would hereby be motivated and might in consequence have been, and likely was, of older extraneous origin than among the Greeks themselves.

Sappho's famous hymn¹⁹ to Aphrodite provides the earliest direct reference to the sparrow as the bird of the goddess:

χρύσιον ἦλθες
ἄρμ' ὑπαζεύξαισα . κάλοι δέ σ' ἄγον
ᾠκεες στρουῖθι περὶ γᾶς μελαίνας
πύκνα δινεῦντες πτερ' ἀπ' ὠράνῳ αἴθε-
ρος διὰ μέσσω

Athenaeus²⁰ also refers to the riding of the sparrows by Aphrodite as an indication of the amorous nature of the bird. Wilamowitz²¹ sees nothing in the picture except a striking incongruity not to be explained by the erotic character of the sparrow. Mure²² wishes to recognize in the use of the sparrows instead of doves or other means merely a symbol of ocheutic love. Despite the passage in Athenaeus and the later erotic symbolism attaching to the bird his view is certainly untrue of the present passage. Though the dove was attached to the goddess in Oriental religion this idea spread very gradually in Greece and the older literature does not recognize the dove as the sacred bird of Aphrodite. It is only late that a pair of doves comes to form the team for

¹⁸ Cf. Cic. *de Div.* 2. 30. 65; Aristot. *H. A.* 9. 58; id. *Frag.* 273 (B and B); Aubert and Wimmer, *Aristoteles Thierkunde*, II, 251, n. 58.

¹⁹ Cf. Sappho, *Frag.* 1. 8-12.

²⁰ Athenaeus, IX. 391 f (tr. Yonge): "And perhaps it is from such an idea that Sappho represents Venus as being drawn by sparrows yoked in her chariot; for they are very amorous birds and very prolific."

²¹ Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Sappho und Simonides*, p. 45.

²² *Hist. of Gk. Lit.*, III, 309 n.

Aphrodite's chariot.²³ The eroticism is not yet developed and whatever the reason for the original connection of the sparrow the bird is the only one in early times native and peculiar to the goddess. This appears as well in plastic art as will be noted later.

In another fragment of Sappho ὥς δὲ παῖς πεδὰ μάτερα πεπτερύγωμαι²⁴ it has been thought that the reference was possibly to the sparrow. This is partly because the well known sparrow poem of Catullus seems to have imitated the poem of Sappho containing the above line:²⁵

Passer, deliciae, meae puellae,
Quem plus illa oculis suis amabat:
Nam mellitus erat suamque norat
Ipsam tam bene quam puella matrem.²⁶

There is undoubtedly a direct copying of the passage of Sappho by Aristophanes in the *Lysistrata*.²⁷ Just as Aphrodite is borne by the sparrow so a woman endeavors to escape "sparrow-back" from the Acropolis where she and her companions are confined. The plot of the *Lysistrata* makes the comparison distinct and the Scholiast gives the proper interpretation of the poet's motive in introducing the sparrow.²⁸ The lines are as follows:

τὴν δ' ἐπὶ στρουθοῦ μίαν
ἥδη πέτεσθαι διανοομένην κάτω
ἐς Ὀρσιλόχου χθῆς τῶν τριχῶν κατέσπασα.

The phrase ἐπὶ στρουθοῦ is formed on the analogy of ἐφ' ἵππου or even ἐπ' ἀετοῦ (cf. Ganymede) and is the appropriate method of conveyance of the lovesick devotee of the goddess as well

²³ Preller-Robert, l. c., p. 381, n. 5; cf. Hehn, *Culturpflanzen*,³ pp. 296 ff.

²⁴ Frag. 38 (Bergk).

²⁵ Wharton, *Sappho*, p. 95.

²⁶ Catullus, 3. 3-6.

²⁷ Aristoph. *Lys.* 723-25.

²⁸ The scholiast on v. 723 reads: ἐπὶ στρουθοῦ: "Inasmuch as the bird is lecherous."

The scholiast on v. 725 reads: ἐς Ὀρσιλόχου: "Orsiloehus was a pander and an adulterer."

as of the goddess herself. A passage in Apuleius²⁹ shows the connection of both sparrows and doves with Venus:

At Venus . . . caelum petit. Iubet construi currum . . . De multis . . . procedunt quatuor candidae columbae, et . . . iugum gemmeum subeunt . . . Currum deae prosequentes gannitu constrepenti lasciviunt passeress . . . Nec obvias aquilas vel accipitres rapaces pertimescit magnae Veneris canora familia.

This is, so far as can be ascertained, the only passage in Latin literature where the sparrow is directly associated with Venus³⁰ though there is much indirect testimony of various nature as is given elsewhere.

The connection of the ostrich with the sparrow is one of some interest. They are denoted by the same word in Greek *στρουθός* and Latin 'passer.' Various adjectives were added to differentiate the ostrich from the sparrow by Herodotus, Xenophon, Aristotle, Lucian, Pausanias and others.³¹ *Passer marinus* or *struthocamelus* (later *struthio*-) was ordinarily used for the ostrich in Latin for the same purpose.

It is difficult to see the direct cause for the use of the same term for two such different animals. Keller thinks the name arose merely as *Volkswitz*³² and as this is analogous to other similar phenomena in Greek it may be the correct explanation. However, the birds have certain characteristics and attributes in common. The ostrich lays an unusual number of eggs just as the sparrow.³³ It was noted for its amativeness and its name could in consequence be used as a term of reproach³⁴

²⁹ Apuleius, *Metam.* VI. 6.

³⁰ Cf. Martin, *Birds of the Latin Poets*, p. 165.

³¹ *μέγας* and *μεγάλη* are by far the commonest.

³² Keller, *l. c.*, p. 174.

³³ Aristot. *H. A.* 9. 15. 88; id. *de Gen.* 4. 6. 774 b; id. *H. A.* 9. 22 (p. 1052), where he states that it lays more than 20; Plin. *N. H.* 10. 52. 73: plurima pariunt struthiocameli, gallinae, perdices; id. *N. H.* 11. 37. 47; et quaedam animalium naturaliter calvent sicut struthiocameli et corvi aquatici, quibus apud graecos nomen inde; Aelian, *de Nat. Animal.* 4. 37 and 14. 7.

³⁴ Seneca, *de Constantia Sapientis*, 17. 1: In senatu flentem vidimus Fidum Cornelium, Nasonis generum, cum illum Corbulo struthiocamelum depilatum dixisset. Adversus alia maledicta, mores et vitam convulnerantia, frontis illi firmitas constitit: adversus hoc tam absurdum lacrimae prociderunt.

as in the case of the sparrow. In addition, there seems reason to think that they were felt to be associated in their functions in relation to the goddess of love. Whether this arose merely from association of the name or for other reasons is now hard to determine.

The ostrich is actually found in certain cases serving somewhat as the sparrows in the ode of Sappho. Pausanias has the following:

There is a statue on Helicon of Arsinoë, whom her brother Ptolemy took to wife; and a bronze ostrich is carrying Arsinoë.³⁵

Here we have Arsinoë, elsewhere identified with Aphrodite, carried on the ostrich just as the goddess is conveyed by the sparrows. We know from Athenaeus that Arsinoë's husband, Ptolemy Philadelphus, exhibited several pairs of ostriches in his great procession at Alexandria in 275 B. C.,³⁶ a fact which gives color to the attachment of the bird to his wife. The winged steed (*ales equos*)³⁷ of Venus, or Arsinoë in the guise of Venus, in Catullus is almost universally identified as the ostrich, as above mentioned. That the ostrich serves as the attendant of Venus (or Arsinoë)³⁸ can also be inferred from Catullus.³⁹ The further identification of Arsinoë with Aphrodite is well established. She was worshiped as Kypris, referred to as Aphrodite Zephyritis, and attributes and functions of the goddess were conferred on her.⁴⁰

³⁵ Paus. 9. 31. 1.

³⁶ Athenaeus, V. 200 f.

³⁷ Catullus, 66. 54.

³⁸ Catullus, 66. 56.

³⁹ A vase painting of the fourth century represents what seems to be a comic chorus mounted on ostriches, indicating that the Greeks were familiar, at least by that time, with such an idea. We also know that ostriches were later at Rome attached to chariots and used in the races of the circus. Cf. Daremberg et Saglio, p. 703; Plaut. *Pers.* 199.

⁴⁰ Cf. Steph. Byz. s. v. *Ζεφύριον* (p. 295 f.); Athenaeus (VII. 318d), who quotes an epigram of Posidippus on the 'Cyprian' Arsinoë, worshipped on the promontory of Zephyrium as goddess of the sea, just as Aphrodite, under the title of Zephyritis or *ἐν τῷ Ζεφυρίῳ*; Callimachus (Epigr. 5): In this epigram Arsinoë is called Zephyritis and Kypris. An offering of a shell is brought to her temple by a young bride as was customary with Aphrodite herself.

A curious passage in the *Birds* of Aristophanes⁴¹ brings Cybele into connection with the sparrow or ostrich, as the case may be:

Ιε. Καὶ Φρυγίῳ Σαβαζίῳ καὶ στρουθῷ μεγάλη μητρὶ θεῶν καὶ ἀνθρώπων.

ΙΙ. δέσποινα Κυβέλη, στρουθέ, μήτερ Κλεοκρίτου.

The play upon *μεγάλη* in the first line is evident. The scholiast on the passage quotes from Didymus:

That Cleocritus is attacked in comedy as a cinaedus and in the mysteries of Rhea cinaedi have a place.

We also know from Suidas⁴² that Cleocritus is satirized as a lewd and shameless person whose mother could fitly be referred to under the name of that goddess to whom he was especially devoted and who could be characterized as a sparrow (or an ostrich). There is certainly a play on sparrow and ostrich with the emphasis on the former.⁴³ Cybele is thus apparently the "sparrow" or "ostrich-goddess," an implication confirmed, as will be seen, in various ways.

The identification of Cybele and Aphrodite⁴⁴ is evidenced from very early times. In the Homeric hymn to Aphrodite that goddess is in effect the Idaean mountain mother,⁴⁵ as is often the case with Cybele herself. Aphrodite as well as Rhea was also called Cybele by the Lydians and Phrygians and was often interchanged with her in Lydia and on the Trojan Ida.⁴⁶ Inscriptions also testify at a later time to their conjunction.⁴⁷ The Eastern origin of each probably accounts in part for their association.⁴⁸ Similar functions and attributes were

⁴¹ Aristoph. *Av.* 875-77.

⁴² Suidas, s. v. Κλεόκριτος.

⁴³ The interpretation of "struthos" here, as applied to the mother of Cleocritus, as 'sparrow-footed' (i. e. small-footed) or 'ostrich-footed' (i. e. with large feet) is somewhat forced and, although possible, hard to substantiate. Even then it does not interfere necessarily with the other connotation of the passage. Cf. Plin. *N. H.* 7.2: "feminis adeo parvas [plantas] ut struthopodes appellentur; cf. also the scholiast on *Aves*, ad loc.

⁴⁴ Preller-Robert, *l. c.*, pp. 641-42, 652, n. 2.

⁴⁵ *Hom. Hym. Aphrod.* passim.

⁴⁶ Hesychius and Photius, s. v. Κυβήβη.

⁴⁷ *CIA*, III, 134-37; 888.

⁴⁸ Luebker, *Reallexikon*, p. 569; Preller-Robert, *l. c.*, pp. 641-42.

certainly at the basis of this belief. The representation on a jasper cylinder of an ostrich in company with the Semitic Mylitta (or Astarte), the Oriental counterpart of Aphrodite, is in point.⁴⁹ Gem cutters also represented Amor driving a span of ostriches.⁵⁰ It is interesting also to note in this connection that the South American ostrich, *Rhea Americana*, has been supposed to have acquired its name from the association of the bird with the *magna mater*.⁵¹

As a development from the connection of the sparrow with Venus or perhaps more exactly as the primary reason for the attribution of the bird to her we find much evidence regarding its amativeness and prolificness. The testimony of Aristotle⁵² to the number of its eggs has been mentioned above. Elsewhere⁵³ he speaks of its great fecundity, its quickness and frequency in associating with its mate,⁵⁴ the supposedly short life of the male, presumably due to its amorous habits, and the immature state of its offspring at birth. Clearchus⁵⁵ testifies to the incontinence of the bird when within sight or hearing of the female. Athenaeus⁵⁶ also speaks of the incon-

⁴⁹ Cf. Keller, *l. c.*, p. 595.

⁵⁰ Imhoof-Blumer and O. Keller, *Tier- u. Pflanzenbilder*, 1889, XXII, 36.

⁵¹ The early trade in ostrich eggs between Mycenae, Latium, and Etruria with the East and South is shown by representations in numerous graves and burial places. In the grotto of Isis at Vulci there was the drawing of an ostrich egg in Syrian or North African style. Any connection of the bird with such pagan deities as Astarte or Isis could well account for its being a forbidden article of food to the Jews according to Mosaic law. Cf. Keller, *l. c.*, p. 169; Lamprid. *Heliogab.* 28. 4.

⁵² Aristotle, *frag.* 273 (B and B).

⁵³ Aristot. *de Gen.* 4. 97; *ibid.* 5. 466b 11; *ibid.* 4. 6. 774 b; *id. H. A.* 9. 7. 58 (613); *ibid.* 5. 2. 8. (539b).

⁵⁴ Cf. Horapoll., *Hieroglyph.* II. 115: septies in hora coit abundanter sperma emittens.

⁵⁵ Quoted in Athenaeus, IX. 389 f.

⁵⁶ Athenaeus, IX. 391 e-f (tr. Yonge): "Sparrows also are very amorous birds; on which account Terpsicles says, that those who eat sparrows are rendered exceedingly prone to amorous indulgences; and perhaps it is from such an idea that Sappho represents Venus as being drawn by sparrows yoked in her chariot; for they are very amorous birds and very prolific. The sparrow has about eight young at one hatching, according to the statement of Aristotle."

tinence of the bird and quotes Terpsicles regarding the use of its flesh as an aphrodisiac. In substantiation of this he mentions the passage of Sappho, as well as the fecundity and amateness of the bird itself. Elsewhere he refers to the lewdness of the kisses of hetaerae as "sparrow-kisses."⁵⁷ Hesychius testifies to the lustful qualities of the bird, as, apparently to those of the ostrich,⁵⁸ when he cites the use of their names as designations of lewd and shameless persons.

The second and third poems of Catullus are concerned with Lesbia's sparrow. It has been thought that these poems conceal an obscene meaning but this, though perhaps possible, has been rather generally denied. There is no question, despite certain doubts, of the identity of the sparrow in this place with the passer domesticus. Pet sparrows have often been kept in Italy as pets by ladies of rank.⁵⁹ The various allusions to the 'passer' of Catullus in Juvenal, Martial, etc.,⁶⁰ seem to indicate the custom of women in keeping them as pets. It is also stated by Cicero⁶¹ that Lesbia possessed a statue of Venus which she decked with the spoils of her lovers. It has consequently been thought and is in no wise improbable that she felt herself under the protection of this particular deity⁶² and in a sense imitated her in keeping the bird as her companion. Her name is even suggestive in this regard. Lesbia imitates Sappho and Aphrodite and the sparrow is as symbolic with her as with them. The quotation from Anaxandrides, cited above, indicates the symbolic and amatory signification of sparrows for lovers, a function emphasized by other uses to which the words *στρουθός* and 'passer' are by now applied.

⁵⁷ Ephippus, in Athenaeus, XIII. 571e.

⁵⁸ Hesychius, *s. v.* *στρουθός*: ὁ καταφέρής, καὶ λᾶγνος. Ἀπτικοὶ δὲ στρουθακμήλους. Cf. the *struthiocamelum depilatum* of Seneca, cited above.

⁵⁹ Cf. Ellis, *Comment. on Catullus*, II, introd.; Mart. 7.14.4: Lesbia nequitiis passeris orba sui.

⁶⁰ Juv. 6. 8; Mart. 1.7.3; 4.14.14; 11.6.16, etc.

⁶¹ Cic. *Cael.* xxi. 52.

⁶² Cf. Catullus, 36.3; nam sanctae Veneri Cupidinique vovit (Lesbia); cf. Ellis, *l. c.*, III, introd.

By this time the status of the bird, its habits and the connotation of its name were well established. Even Cicero⁶³ speaks of the "voluptas, quae passeribus nota est omnibus, a nobis intellegi non potest." Pliny⁶⁴ repeats the statements of Aristotle regarding the salacity of the sparrow, the short life of the male, and the supposed reasons for this belief. He also enlarges upon the use of the flesh of sparrows or even their eggs as an aphrodisiac, in a passage copied almost verbatim by Marcellus Empiricus⁶⁵ in the *De Medicamentis*.

As a result of the apparent character of the bird the word 'passer' and the diminutives 'passerculus' and 'passercula' came to be used as terms respectively of reproach in the case of lewd and shameless persons or of love and affection. The 'passer'⁶⁶ of Juvenal, the 'passerculus' and 'passercula' of Plautus, Pliny the Younger, Fronto, and Varro are all in point. In the several instances in which the diminutive occurs in Plautus it is ordinarily associated with other animals of like characteristics, as columbae, lepores, gallinae, coturnices.

Of even more striking import are the 'passerinum prandium' quoted in Nonius,⁶⁷ though the meaning of the latter is somewhat in doubt, and the 'strutheum' of Festus. The interesting statement of the latter is paralleled by what

⁶³ Cic. *de Fin.* 2.23.75.

⁶⁴ Plin. *N. H.* 10.36.52: Columbae et turtures octonis annis vivunt. Contra passeri minimum vitae, cui salacitas par. Mares negantur anno diutius durare, argumento quia nulla veris initio appareat nigritudo in rostro, quae ab aestate incipit. Feminis longiusculum spatium. *Ibid.*, 30.15.49: Inhibet Venerem et fimum cochleae et columbinum cum oleo et vino potum . . . Venerem concitant . . . passerres in cibo vel ova eorum. Cf. *id. N. H.* 29.5.30 for the use of ostrich eggs as a rather general specific. Cf. Aristot. *H. A.* 9.7.58 (613).

⁶⁵ Marcellus Empiricus, *de Medicamentis*, XXXIII, 6: Venerem conciliant passerres in cibo sumpti vel ova eorum.

⁶⁶ Juv. *Sat.* 9.54: dic, passer, cui tot montis, tot praedia servas; Plaut. *Asin.* 666, 694; Cas. 138; Plin. *Epist.* 9.25.3; Front. *Ep.* 4.6; Varro, ap. Non. Marc. 79.15.

⁶⁷ Pomp. ap. Non. II.112.7: ut te obiectes frustatim passerinum prandium.

we know of the similar use of other names of lascivious animals in both Greek and Latin. In the Festi fragmenta⁶⁸ it is as follows:

strutheum in mimis praecipue vocant obscenam partem virilem, (a) salacitate videlicet passeris, qui graece στρουθός dicitur.

In the Pauli excerpta⁶⁹ the wording is slightly changed:

strutheum membrum virile a salacitate passeris, qui graece στρουθός⁴ dicitur, a mimis praecipue appellatur.⁷⁰

The passage quoted from Juvenal:

dic, passer, cui tot montis, tot praedia servas⁷¹

where 'passer' is interpreted as senex lascivus et salax instar passeris gives an idea of how such use could develop. The use of 'passer' in this sense⁷² as well as the use of 'strutheum' is taken from the Greeks. The στρουθίον (sprig or chaplet) of Eubulus,⁷³ the comic poet, used with a play on στρουθός (lecher) is parallel to the 'strutheum' of Festus. The 'ostrich' is used in a similar way in Petronius.⁷⁴ In Egyptian symbolism the sparrow denoted the father of many children.⁷⁵

Suidas⁷⁶ has a parallel to this use of 'passer' in his στρουθός, ὁ λελωβημένος. Hesychius, cited above, interprets 'sparrow' or 'ostrich' as ὁ καταφέρῃς καὶ λάγνος. The στρουθός in the passage cited from the *Birds*⁷⁷ may bear a similar signification though it is perhaps doubtful if this use had developed by that time. Στρουθίον was apparently a common name for a

⁶⁸ Festus (ed. Lindsay), p. 410.

⁶⁹ Paulus (ed. Lindsay), p. 411.

⁷⁰ Compare the use of χελιδών, κορώνη, ἀηδών; viz. hirundo, cornix, luscinia.

⁷¹ Juv. Sat. 9.54; cf. PLM (ed. Baehrens), I, *Priapea*, 26.5; vernis passeribus salaciores.

⁷² The στρουθίς ἀκαρής of Alexis (frag. 144, p. 349 K) may refer either to the sparrow or to the ostrich and is certainly used of a lewd and shameless fellow.

⁷³ Eubulus, fr. 104, p. 199 K.

⁷⁴ Petron. Sat. VII 137: ego tibi pro ansere struthiocamelum reddam.

⁷⁵ Horapoll. Hieroglyph. II, 115.

⁷⁶ Suidas, s. v.

⁷⁷ Aristoph. Av. 877.

hetaera and Στρουθίας and Στρουθίων were stock names given to parasites as such.⁷⁸

The representations of the sparrow in connection with Venus in works of art are rather infrequent. The one mentioned by Keller⁷⁹ of a sparrow sitting at her right is perhaps the most typical. Allied with this is the passage in the *Ephe-siaca* of Xenophon of Ephesus⁸⁰ which mentions the magnificent coverlet in a bridal chamber on which were embroidered Loves at play, some in attendance on Aphrodite, who was also in the scene, and others riding as knights upon sparrows. It is hardly to be doubted that the writer had in mind in this description some embroidered scene and that he is not merely drawing on his imagination. The bronze statue of Arsinoë mounted upon an ostrich, as seen by Pausanias⁸¹ on Mount Helicon, and the jasper cylinder on which Mylitta (or Astarte) is represented in company with an ostrich, have been mentioned, as well as gems which represent Amor driving a span of ostriches. The comic chorus mentioned above is hardly in point without further knowledge of the play and its background.

The rather un-aesthetic and un-artistic type of the sparrow must have precluded any considerable development in the above direction. The disinclination of ancient artists towards subjects of a genre type sufficiently accounts for the paucity of representations.

It is thus seen that the sparrow was the companion of Aphrodite from the earliest times and probably even before her worship was introduced in Greece. It was later supplanted in great part by the dove and other birds, but maintained its function indirectly in other ways, a result partially brought about by its connection with the goddess and partly eventuating from its own well known characteristics. These

⁷⁸ Cf. Schol. Luc. *Catapl.* 12, (p. 46 Rabe); Aleiphron, 1.9, 3.7; Athenaeus, X. 434 c; Plut. *adul. et am.* 13; Luc. *Fugit.* 19.

⁷⁹ Keller, *l. c.*, p. 90.

⁸⁰ Xenophon of Ephesus, I, 8 (Hercher, p. 336).

⁸¹ Paus. 9.31.1.

uses and functions became stereotyped, as it were, in ancient times and are even re-echoed in English and other literatures, unless we are to think that a folk-lore regarding the bird has developed similarly and independently in several countries.

THE LIBRARY OF THE

JUN 27 1924

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA



3 0112 075873692